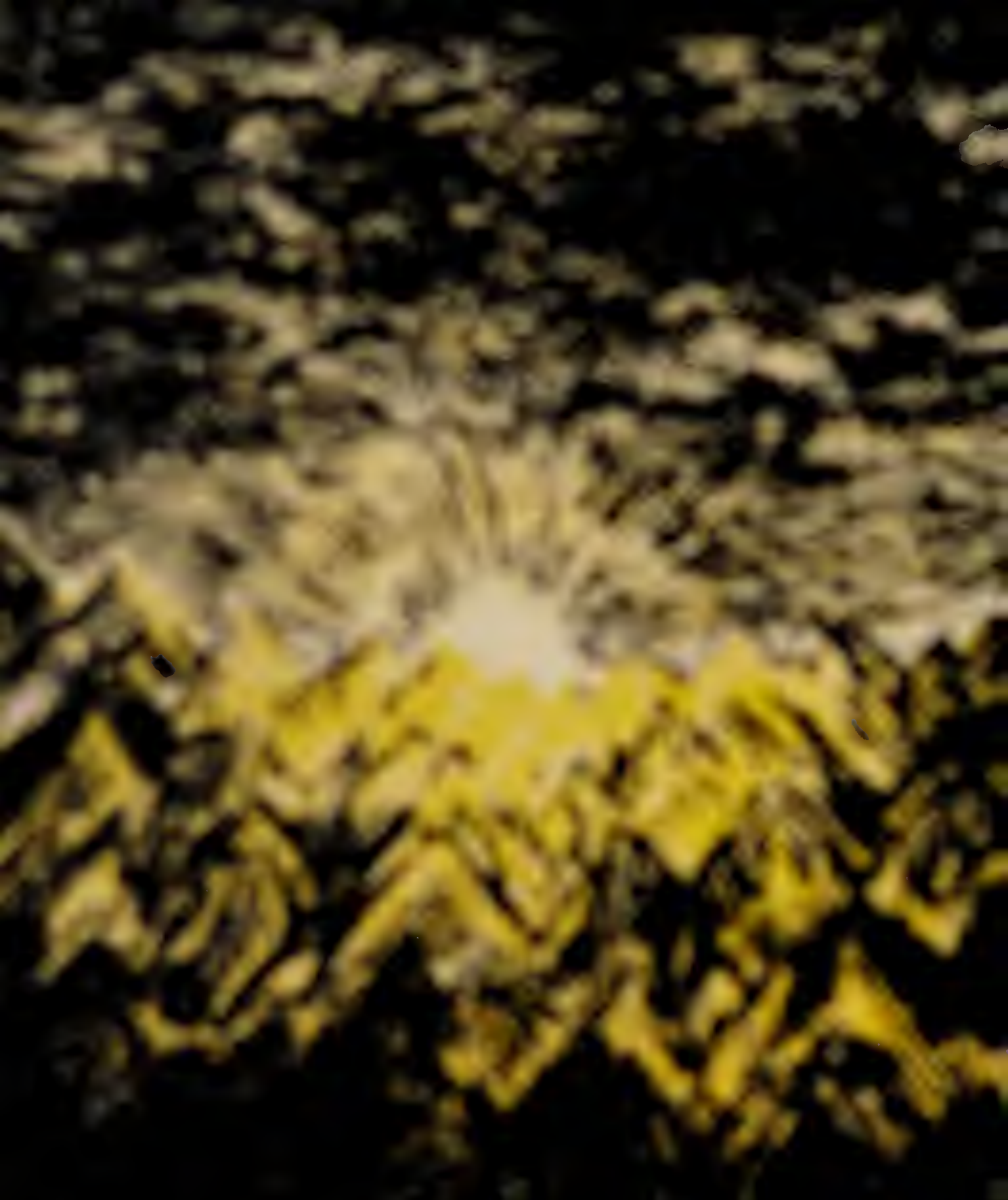




PURGATORY

BY RAYMOND MORRISON, S.J.

*The
Nunatak in the North*



PURGATORY

by

BAKEWELL MORRISON, S.J.



THE QUEEN'S WORK

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DEBTS

IF YOU HAVE ever been in debt, you know how wonderful is the feeling of satisfaction that surges through you as you finally pay it off. Maybe you have been paying on a debt for years, budgeting your salary and limiting your expenses. But when the last dollar is applied and the contract is cancelled, you experience a relaxing of tension and the happiness of a newly-born freedom. No man likes being in debt — even though financial necessity at times demands it. Likewise, everyone thrills when his bills have been paid in full. It is written in the heart of every man to face up to and meet all his debts and commitments. There will be nothing like the joy you feel if your final debt is paid and you enter heaven.

Now when these debts are incurred during one's service of God — and the Church teaches us that practically everyone can be considered to be in debt to God when death comes to him — they must be paid before he can see God in the Beatific Vision. If the debt is an eternal one — for unrepented mortal sin — it is paid eternally in hell. If it is temporal, the debt is paid in purgatory. Purgatory is a place of punishment where

the debts incurred by one's unrepented venial sins and the unremitted punishment due to forgiven sins are paid in full.

It has been revealed to us that when one dies his soul is judged immediately. When the judgment has been made, the soul is sent to one of three places: hell, purgatory, which is a prelude to heaven, or heaven. In this pamphlet we will contain our interests to the subject of purgatory and we will try to tell you what may happen to you so you can use the knowledge for yourself and generously stir yourself to do more for the Poor Souls.

When a person appears before the Redeemer, his God and Judge, he, of course, hopes to hear the glorious words, "Come, blessed of my Father, take possession of the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." We all know that Our Lady went right to heaven. We are also aware of the comforting teaching of modern theologians on the efficacy of the Sacrament of Extreme Unction and on the full employment of indulgences that tells us that many a person can be admitted immediately to the enjoyment of the Beatific Vision. Nevertheless, most of us feel that in our cases this glorious judgment will be modified. We expect to be sentenced to purgatory, where we will work out our

debts. Then, when the purging has been completed, we will be called to enter into the joys of the blessed.

WHY SHOULD WE SUFFER IN PURGATORY?

Why should we have to pay back in purgatory, when we have said, before we died, that we were sorry for all our sins and really meant it? Let us consider that an old friend has been called by death and you attend his wake. As you look at him for the last time you recall how you worked, fought, frolicked, and lived together. With him you had good times, fun — wholesome fun . . . not bad, you know. But then again there were occasions when your actions were not so good. You see yourself in a new light and begin to measure your conduct against the vast screen of eternity. You become afraid that your friend has been too much like yourself.

You certainly feel that, no matter how much goodness you have known in yourself, you know the evil, the petty malice, the injustices, and the other things that bring a blush still as you recall them — things that make you feel uncomfortable as you remember them and wish they had not been.

You ask yourself if there is nothing for you to do about them except desire never

to repeat them. Can you shrug them off by can't do that really. You carry your memory saying, "Let bygones be bygones"? You ories. You carry yourself with yourself — your habits, hobbies, principles, daydreams, experiences, whims, disappointments, and a thousand other psychic things. Do you ever fail in your ideals? You do really know that you ought to make amends, even when your hurt to another, your cowardice to God, or your failure to yourself are things that no one knows but you.

WE FEEL WE NEED

I recall a conversation, started by an absolute stranger, my neighbor in a street-car. Somehow we got to the philosophizing stage. He set out to tell me that he "didn't feel so good today." He'd done a mean thing and he "just didn't feel right." He didn't so much mind the other fellow whom he had hurt a little, but he had failed himself; he hadn't measured up to his own standards; he hadn't kept the Golden Rule. And my thought, in retrospect, was, "There goes a man who carries with him somewhat of the proof that there must be a purgatory. He is admitting that he won't be himself again until he has made up, somehow, for his fault — made up to himself, if he can, and, as our Catechism counsels us, made up, in some definite way, to God, too.

Is there one of us who feels ready to face his God without some attempt at preparation? . . . and at reparation? And where, if earthly life denies us time, or we let slip our opportunity, may we accomplish this? We must not disregard the Christian teaching that warns us God will hold us to be pure, "completely purified," when first we meet Him in the Beatific Vision.

The Church, that touchingly sensitive and appreciative Mother, will not let her children forget that the Poor Souls need help. She jogs our memory in many ways.

Catholic funerals begin with that magnificently compelling plea: "*Subvenite . . .*" ("Come to his aid, ye saints of God; rush up to help him, ye angels of the Lord; take up his soul, present it in the sight of the Most High.")

We have all heard it many times, as the priest confronts the casket, newly brought into the church. The bearers pause a while, for the blessing, then, the celebrant begins in stronger earnest the great plea. There is more of it, of course, than I have put down, but we feel the admitted need of help from those on high, so, with hope and fine courage, we call on the redeemed, the conquerors in Christ's kingdom, for their aid. We want to help, we, ourselves, with our eager

prayers, but guided and assisted from a higher source of succor.

The liturgy continues. "*Requiem!*" The Church pleads. "Let them be at rest!"

Pius XII, in his encyclical, *On the Mystical Body*, wants "No member of this revered Body to be forgotten in this common prayer; let there be a special memento for those that are burdened with sorrows and afflictions of this earthly habitation, *and for the departed souls in Purgatory.*"

The Old Testament, too, though shadowing forth the substance of things to come, though prophesying, which is a form of teaching, tells us, in the second book of Machabees, that the dead are to be prayed for, "that they may be loosed from their sins." (In Msgr. Knox's version: "And these had made a godly end; could he doubt a rich recompense awaited them? A holy and wholesome thought it is to pray for the dead, for their guilt's undoing.")

EARLY CHRISTIANS TEACH

We need not pile up instances in the infant Church to show that the dogma of purgatory was taken for granted. Early on, St. Augustine (356-430) composed a short treatise on the *Care to be Given the Dead*.

The lives of the saints tell us that Christians, holy Christians, often prayed for their dead. It is worth reading every word recorded of those two heroic women, Perpetua, the Roman matron, and Felicity, her slave. The Canon of the Mass recalls them to us daily. St. Perpetua, who died for her Faith, who gave up the nursing at her breast that she might go into the arena and die for her Faith, had a vision that is preserved for us in her "Acts," about 200 A.D. Her little brother had died. Shortly thereafter she had a dream in which she saw him, just as he had been, some 6 years old. He was making sturdy effort to drink from a fountain that played and sprayed its water, always just out of his reach; she must needs, in her dream, lift him up, that, comforted by his drink, he might go and play. It is a touching tale, and gives evidence that this Christian woman could feel and know the need her little brother, dead, but still in her care, had for the assuagement of his purgatory. So her chroniclers interpreted this dream, and so we may want to recall it. It may also help us to know how long the idea of purgatory has held the minds of Churchmen.

REPARATION NOW

There is another solid reason why we should suffer in purgatory, why the unremitted penalties of remitted sins must be cleared from the soul by suffering. It is the fact that we so stupidly, so harshly, so cruelly refuse to do for ourselves what we might readily do. We are prone to overlook the necessity of reparation to the Sacred Heart for "all our sins, offenses, negligences," and yet in every Mass we are so admonished.

As Pius X has it, we need to work off our debts. There is a stumbling block that we have put up against God; there is an offense against His divine Majesty; there is the violated order of our lives that needs, by penance, to be reintegrated. We are all sinners and we need to suffer with and suffer for our God. We must make satisfaction — total satisfaction — before, even, we can forgive ourselves. And can anyone forget the Our Father, "Forgive us as we forgive?"

No, it will not do to solace ourselves that we can let bygones be bygones. We just know that is not possible. From the tender tooth that, neglected, lives to punish us for our insolence, to the tender conscience we tried to quench, only, in the long run, learning that we could not go on fooling ourselves forever, nature takes pains to warn us of

inevitable penalties. God warns us too, through His Church, and she eloquently reminds us, "There is a purgatory. Pray ye all for the poor souls that, in your turn, there may be mercy shown to you."

THE TREASURY OF THE CHURCH

As surely, then, as there is a resurrection of the dead, so surely is there need of expiation for our sins — total expiation. This can be accomplished here on earth, by using the treasury of the Church, through Extreme Unction and indulgences, rightly and holily received, through the pains and difficulties of our lives, when these are met with courage and a right intention. Supremely we must never forget what the Council of Trent so incisively teaches: "The Mass may properly be offered . . . for the sins, punishments, satisfaction, and other necessities of the faithful on earth, as well as for those who have died in Christ and are not yet wholly cleansed." And still we need to soak ourselves well in the knowledge that we are sinners and that we must pay our debts. These can be wiped out for us — sinners all, though members of the Mystical Body of Christ — in a purgatory which God exacts. He provides these means that our souls may have a way to reach perfection. Could there be a better reason for suffering after death?

OUR LORD BOUGHT US

Let us for a moment consider the expiation which Our Lord merited by His love and obedience. It is from this treasury that we draw on His richness. It is from Him that we may enjoy His gift through the Mass, the sacraments, indulgences, prayers, good works.

No one has ever better described what it meant to Our Lord to pay for our sins than Cardinal Newman. We can refresh our own appreciation of the enormity of our own sins by seeing in Newman's words how Our Lord did penance for us and merited for us His treasury.

If we can feel something of His feeling at the onslaught of sin, we can perhaps better appreciate the ghastliness of our own sinning. If we can acknowledge the debt He took on Himself to expiate, we can, maybe, better know our own debts which made Him our Debtor: "It is therefore necessary," says a saint, "that either the honor (abstracted from God by our sins) shall be restored, or punishment shall follow; otherwise, God were either unjust to Himself, or were powerless, which it is a shame even to imagine."

Newman says: "There (in the Garden) then in that most awful hour, knelt the Saviour of the world, putting off the de-

fenses of His divinity And His ears, they ring with sounds of revelry and of strife; and His heart is frozen with avarice, and cruelty, and unbelief; and His very memory is laden with every sin which has been committed since the fall, in all regions of the earth, with the pride of the old giants, and the lusts of the five cities, and the obduracy of Egypt, and the ambition of Babel, and the unthankfulness and scorn of Israel. Oh, who does not know the misery of a haunting thought which comes again and again, in spite of rejection, to annoy, if it cannot seduce? Or of some odious and sickening imagination, in no sense one's own, but forced upon the mind from without? Or of evil knowledge, gained with or without a man's fault, but which he would give a great price to be rid of once and forever? And adversaries such as these gather around Thee, Blessed Lord, in millions now Of the living and of the dead and of the as yet unborn, of the lost and of the saved, of Thy dearest are there . . . not as comforters but as accusers. All are there but one; one only is not there, one only; for she, who had no part in sin, she only should console Thee, and therefore she is not nigh. She will be near Thee on the Cross, she is separated from Thee in the garden"

As we make our meditation on why we should suffer for our sins in purgatory, do

we not see how there can be much that has escaped the cleansing of the soul before death and how in purgatory we shall complete the purging of our stains?

WHAT THE POOR SOULS SUFFER

What the souls in purgatory suffer is a moot question. The Church teaches that they suffer and are cleansed by suffering. That truth is a dogmatic certainty.

ST. THOMAS MORE SAYS

St. Thomas More, who was martyred by Henry VIII in 1535, tells us his views on what they suffer, which were those currently entertained during the Middle Ages. He was answering Simon Fish, who had argued against the existence of purgatory in his plea that Henry VIII should abolish the monasteries, give the wealth therein contained to the poor, and so abolish poverty. In his work *A Supplication of Souls*, St. Thomas depicts a soul in purgatory.

“If ye pity the poor, there is none so poor as we, that have not a coat to put on our backs. If ye pity the blind, there is none so blind as we, which are here in the dark, saving for sights unpleasant and loathsome until some comfort come. If ye pity the lame, there is none so lame as we, that can neither creep one foot out of the fire,

nor have one hand at liberty to defend our face against the flame. Finally, if ye pity any man in pain, never knew ye pain comparable to ours, whose fire far surpasseth in heat all the fires that ever burned on earth as the hottest of that passeth a feigned fire painted on a wall. If ever ye lay sick, or thought the night long, and longed sore for the day, while every hour seemed longer than five, bethink ye then what a long night we silly souls endure, that lie sleepless, restless, burning and broiling in the dark fire one long night of many days, of many weeks, and some of many years together. You walter, peradventure, and toltter in sickness from side to side and find little rest in any part of the bed; we lie bound to the brands and cannot lift up our heads. You have your physicians with you that sometimes cure and heal you; no physician will cure our pains nor no times cool our heart."

ST. CATHERINE SAYS

St. Catherine of Genoa in her little *Treatise*, written in 1551, shows us an ameliorative and intrinsic purgatory rather than an extrinsic and vindictive one. But it is important to notice that Catherine did not deny the purifying action of material fire in purgatory. She simply did not treat of it. She is solely occupied with stressing the psychological purification of the soul

under the agency of the metaphorical fire of infused knowledge and love. But we can best show what we mean by quoting St. Catherine herself:

“When with its inner sight the soul sees itself drawn by God with such loving fire, then it is melted by the heat of the glowing love for God, its most dear Lord, which it feels overflowing it. And it sees by the divine light that God does not cease from drawing it, nor from leading it, lovingly and with much care and unfailing foresight, to its full perfection, doing this of His pure love. But the soul, being hindered by sin, cannot go whither God draws it; it cannot follow the uniting look with which He would draw it to Himself. Again the soul perceives the grievousness of being held back from seeing the divine light; the soul’s instinct, too, being drawn by that uniting look, craves to be unhindered. I say that it is the sight of these things which begets in the soul the pain they feel in purgatory.”

THEOLOGIANS SAY

You should not be surprised if in this matter Catholics disagree among themselves. The truth of purgatory and the truth that the redeemed may suffer there are Catholic doctrines. These attempts at clarifying what God has not more explicitly told us in His Word and what the Church has not defined

or taught in her *magisterium* (in her teaching) and made fixed and irrevocable, are part of the glory and amplitude of the Church. She is so sure that she can afford to acknowledge just where she is not sure. As St. Augustine says it: "I can't see how a man can be criticized for being wrong if there is something he does not know; but he is wrong when he thinks he knows what he does not know."

We know that when there were "talks" between the Roman and Greek theologians at the Council of Florence, the Church did not insist against the Greeks on teaching that there was material fire for purgatory. And so, though tales are told and surmises and conjectures are rife, we are free with reverence and patience to choose our opinion for ourselves.

LEGENDS

If you like to think that some souls stay for their purgatory "right around here" where they have always lived, there is, then, a curious story told by St. Gregory that might reassure you. In the fourth Book of his *Dialogues* he tells of a Paschasius, a holy deacon of Rome and author of some eloquent books on the Holy Ghost. Paschasius, unfortunately, had taken the side of the antipope Lawrence against Pope Symmachus. Though dying in the odor of

sanctity, he did not escape purgatory. A good while after his death, Bishop Germanus of Capua was ordered by his physician to take the waters. At his very first visit to the baths, to his intense surprise, he saw standing in the hot water, ready to do him service, this very Paschasius. When Germanus asked him what he was doing there, Paschasius replied that it was on account of his support of Lawrence. Then this strange and indeed somewhat alarming bath attendant said: "Therefore, I beseech you to pray to Our Lord for me, and by this token shall you know that your prayers have been heard if, at your coming again, you do not find me here." When a few days later Germanus returned to the baths, the mysterious attendant was gone. Gregory adds: "Seeing that his fault proceeded not of malice but of ignorance, he might after death be purged of that sin. And yet we must withal think that the plentiful alms which he bestowed in his life obtained favour at God's hands, that he might then deserve pardon when he could work nothing at all for himself."

The story raises a great many questions, and even if we were to concede that good St. Gregory, who loved a tale of this kind, was misled by his informants, the fact remains that the idea of purgatory undergone amongst the living presented no difficulty to the holy Pope's mind.

HALLOWE'EN

The memories that surround you at Hallowe'en demonstrate that the Christian ethos has not disappeared, at least from our language. You are aware of "Trick or treat!" The modern urchins are right proper descendants of those who knew that *les revenants*, "those who come back," could stir themselves, if not always, at least for moments. It does not take much to feel the weird impact of:

"Ghoulies and ghosties and long-legged
beasties and of things that go 'Whomp'
in the night."

Once "everyone" believed that at least some souls of men, though dead, were able under God's providence, even though at the behest of hell or of purgatory, to work yet a while amongst their living compeers for bale or for bliss.

HOW DO THE POOR SOULS IN PURGATORY SUFFER?

Before we can be perfectly clear about how the dead do, we should find out how we ourselves suffer right now. As a matter of fact, we do not even know too surely. To express our thoughts and feelings, we have to rely upon words. And when we do,

we talk in color and weight, in physical sensation if we are to say anything meaningful. The richer, the earthier our language, the nearer we feel that we express ourselves. The abstract moves us little. It tires us. But the expression "That hurts" tells us something. "That burns" . . . "That throbs" . . . "I can't stand that any more" are meaningful, even though we cannot explain the causes that make us use them.

Since we have bodies, we do not know too accurately just how it is we get to know ideas and know abstract things. St. Augustine made some deep and fascinating studies in what we would call psychic research. He gathered tales aplenty. But study and argue as he would, he still did not know for sure how spirit and matter so interacted that the person could really think. He dreamed. He heard of things that went on in men's minds when they were unconscious and later reported. He had reports that looked like clairvoyance. He studied them all, and no more than the modern psychologist and theologian did he come up with perfectly convincing answers — except for the one fact: God will do what He says He will. God says the Poor Souls can suffer and they will.

FAITH ASSURES US

Perhaps we can wrap this all up with another remark of St. Augustine's: "Since God is the author of all natures, why do we not say that the marvel occurs because it is His Will: 'This is the Will of the omnipotent God!' God indeed will do what He hath promised He will do, even though the thing seems impossible to be done."

To those who have faith, that is a quieting answer. We can truly say we do not know just what the Poor Souls suffer nor what we in our turn will endure. It is true enough that before the General Judgment and the resurrection of the body, the persons, even of the just, will have no bodies — barring, of course, Our Lord and His Mother, who, the Church emphatically teaches us, have risen.

WHAT CAN WE DO FOR THE POOR SOULS?

It would be idle to pray for the dead unless there were the resurrection. We must constantly give ourselves a strong appreciation of the hope of a blessed resurrection. In this material-minded age, where we so often measure our potential happiness by the number and excellence of the conveniences and comforts we can lay hand on, we need more exact knowledge of

our total selves. We really need to soak ourselves in the thoughts of the afterworld so as not to be completely lost in thoughts of the here and now. Many completely ignore the supernatural. It is only the death of a friend that makes us think of it. Then there is the pageantry of the funeral cortege and the display of the relatives to make a proper show of their grief. History tells of magnificent funerals. The Popes were buried with pomp and circumstance. The human heart, sometimes aided by the advertising profession, wants to show respect, remembrance, and grief for the beloved dead.

Augustine speaks of the elaborateness of such testimonials with a sharp note of concern: "And therefore all these things concerning the dead, the care of the burial, the fashions of the sepulchres, and the pomps of the funerals are rather solaces of the living than furtherances of the dead. For if a goodly and rich tomb be any help to the wicked man, being dead, then is the poor and mean one a hindrance to the godly man in like case."

Hence, it is well that the practice, so truly Christian, of offering Masses for the departed rather than costly and beautiful tokens has been gathering momentum.

REMEMBER ME!

It is with this thought that Augustine's mother solaced him as she was about to die: "Bury this body where you will," she said, "only, remember me at the altar of God."

We must insist that it is the soul that counts, even when the body rightly demands all reverence. While the living mourn, justly and piously, they must take thought of the fact of the resurrection and bear in mind the liveness and the needs of their beloved.

Tersely and emphatically has the Church consistently taught this truth. She insists on the burial of her dead. For the sake of her children's past and mindful of the resurrection, she forbids cremation. Her requiem services are magnificently moving and unforgettable. From her opening prayer *Subvenite* to the last Our Father and Hail Mary at the edge of the grave, her prayer is one continuous plea for assistance.

THE MEANS FOR HELPING

Because of our natural reaction to the great loss we feel for a dear one, we want to do something for him. So the Church helps us heartily out of the supernatural richness which, she assures us, a merciful and benevolent God has put at her complete

dispensing. The Church does not strictly "absolve" the dead of the punishments due unremitted venial sins and unrepaid temporal punishments yet due to sin. But, as "suffrages" she allows and urges all our efforts. She teaches and she repeats the need these Poor Souls have of our help. They can no longer help themselves. They must give a "satispassion" other than that made by their own meritorious actions while in life.

And so in their behalf we offer Masses, recite the beads, multiply our prayers, increase our good works, apply indulgences — as far as they can be — and do all that may possibly solace the Poor Souls and bring them quickly to their eternal requiem.

Catholics everywhere naturally turn to Christ's Mother, man's most powerful and acceptable intercessor. She has been assigned the role of Mediatrix of all graces.

THE MASS

In an old Marian Mass there is a very beautiful Preface. Very adequately it gives us the dogma and the taste of Our Lady's work for the Poor Souls:

"It is meet indeed and just, right and helpful unto salvation, always and everywhere to give thanks to Thee, holy Lord, Father almighty, through Christ Our Lord,

who for our salvation dying on the Cross hath provided for us with a true Son's intent the Blessed Virgin Mary, His Mother, as our Mother: that she might come to the assistance of all laboring in this vale of tears; that she might help the dying; that she might present to Thee for total refreshment and bliss those that have departed this life. And therefore with all the heavenly host we sing a hymn to Thy glory, saying without ceasing: Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Sabaoth; heaven and earth are full of Thy glory. Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest."

OUR LADY OF RANSOM

We are told that in the 13th century "the Church took occasion to make a new application of the principle of indulgences to those who contributed funds for the redemption of captives held for ransom by the Saracens." Perhaps no one thing in all that era contributed so much to the age-old principle of indulgences as did Our Lady's symbolic ransom of those Christian slaves in Moorish serfdom.

Our Lady of Ransom rode forth with the arms of her faithful Christian knights, the Mercedarians, under Peter Nolasco and Raymond of Pennafort and all who bore the proud "arms" of King James of Aragon

to win renown and redemption for the captives. One quickly thought how these captives were like the Poor Souls in purgatory. For the Poor Souls were captives too and worse off, in that they could not help themselves, than the Christians captured by the savage Moorish foe. And so the scapular of the Mercedarians was originated. And that scapular with its newer crusade for the redemption of captives from purgatory is still issued and blessed by the Church. There is still a career of ransoming Poor Souls, romantically associate, if you like, with the pageantry and pomp of the medieval days.

Many an American heart thrills today at the words of a song "to the shores of Tripoli. . . ." It could be that the redemption of captives — not from Moorish hands and North African shores — from the engulfing and restraining purgatory will still be a vivid and active crusade.

Our Lady can do great things. Her "beads" can solace the living and the dead. Her intercession, her mediation can be of universal application and is to be shared by the whole Church. It is known, loved, and applied for by the Militant Church, the Church Suffering, and the Church Trium-

phant glories in it, too. Hers is the richest finite source in that "treasury" whence God's mercy comes to laboring mankind.

There is so much we have not noticed that the Church of today fosters for the Poor Souls. Notable is the religious sisterhood, "The Helpers of the Holy Souls," devout religious who so generously give their whole lives to the aid of the poor, to the suffering and disconsolate on earth, to the Poor Souls in their desolation in purgatory.

THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS

We should never cease in our efforts at better appreciating the Poor Souls, in understanding their needs, and in using all possible means to help them. It all builds on the Resurrection of Christ, the Redeemer, on the resurrection of the living, and the communion of saints.

Maybe we had best conclude our discussion on the Poor Souls with these verses from Cardinal Newman's famous poem:

THE DREAM OF GERONTIUS

Take me away, and in the lowest deep
There let me be,
And there in hope the lone night-watches
keep,

Told out for me.

There, motionless and happy in my pain,
Lone, not forlorn,

There will I sing my sad perpetual strain,
Until the morn.

There will I sing, and soothe my stricken
breast,

Which ne'er can cease

To throb, and pine, and languish, till possess
Of its Sole Peace.

There will I sing my absent Lord and Love:
Take me away,

That sooner I may rise, and go above
And see Him in the truth of everlasting day.



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